

The THOREAU SOCIETY BULLETIN

NUMBER TWENTY

JULY, 1947

VALUES IN THOREAU by Herbert Faulkner West

(This is a condensation of the lecture delivered at the annual meeting in Concord on July 12. Dr. West is Professor of Comparative Literature at Dartmouth College and author of a number of books on literary subjects.)

The lovely town of Concord is a Mecca for all thoughtful men. Its fame is world-wide. The English, for example, rate Thoreau and Emerson along with their greatest writers. H.M. Tomlinson, the essayist, has written many tributes to Thoreau and to Concord.

When Thoreau lived there were none of the so-called amenities of today: no airplanes, no cinema, no radio, no electric lights, no automobiles, and no atomic energy. All of these have been the products of scientific research.

But today truth is only relative. With the pragmatism of William James has come the loss of absolute truth, of a personal God, of the eternal verities. Bertrand Russell expresses the modern man's lack of belief best in his *A FREE MAN'S WORSHIP*. Since the Copernican Revolution, since the materialism of Marx and Feurbach, the values which Thoreau believed in have been waning in the thinking of modern man. We need only contrast his essays with Philip Wylie's recent *ESSAY ON MORALS* to see how far we have gone. Today we live in an age of science which is also an age of dread and of fear.

Emerson wrote:

There are two laws discrete
Not reconciled,---
Law for man, and law for thing;
The last builds town and fleet,
But it runs wild,
And doth the man unking.

How true this is one can see if he but review our civilization of the past ten or twenty years.

But Thoreau believed, "Knowledge does not come to us by details, but in flashes of light from heaven." Like the Quakers with their doctrine of Inner Light, he put the law of morality first, the voice of conscience which is the voice of God. One will find this best expressed in his essay on "Civil Disobedience."

Three years ago, in his *AN APOLOGY FOR THE ARTS*, W. Macneile Dixon wrote of Scott:

For my part, too, I am still convinced that poetry goes nearer the heart of things, goes deeper than logic, and that the language of poetry is better suited to interpret life for us than the language of science. Human problems are not solved by machinery, by algebra or decimals. We live by the inner light. Take away from the world its romance and its poetry, the belief that we are greater than we know, and may become greater than we are, which is the essence of the poetic creed, and you can take away hope, you 'take the Spring out of the year.' For this creed Scott stood--still stands. He is of the noble army in whose company we experience a lifting, not a sinking of the heart.

I believe this too, and it could have been written about Thoreau as Dixon wrote it about Scott.

We cannot disavow science, but somehow we must reconcile science with a belief in man, a belief in God, and a belief in the spirit. Otherwise we are lost men.

Thoreau has an immense value for us today. He achieved the proper proportions and was able to write of himself, "The fact is I am a mystic, a transcendentalist and a natural philosopher to boot." He sets an example for us with its independence, his thinking for himself, his personal integrity, and his belief in the inner light.

Thoreau has shown the way and he can help us find ourselves again. Are we men or animals? We must believe in man as the interpreter of truth. We must retain the values for which Thoreau stood: values which give man his dignity, irrespective of race, color or creed.

A NEW SOCIETY DIRECTORY

In keeping with the policy established last year, we are issuing with this July bulletin a complete directory of the society's membership. Not only does this new checklist bring the old one up-to-date, but also, since the members are listed by state rather than alphabetically, it acts as a cross-index to the old directory.

Some interesting sidelights on the geographical distribution of our membership were discovered in the making of this new directory and we have drawn this little map to pass them on to you. Massachusetts comes in first with 117 members. New York state is second with an even fifty. There are members in thirty states, the District of Columbia, the Virgin Islands, and seven foreign countries.

At the end of the directory will be found a list of the libraries in this country which have files of our society publications.



THOREAU NOTES

Dr. Henry S. Canby spoke recently before the members of the famed Century Club on Thoreau's leaving Walden.

The syndicated cartoon "Strange as It Seems" for June 12, 1947, announced, "Henry David Thoreau, American writer, reduced his living expenses to 7¢ a day."

Clayton Hoagland reports that the Franklin Society, a savings bank at Broadway and Vesey in New York City, has just installed a large photograph of people buying homes, taking trips, and going to college, and have inscribed over it "Build castles in the air, then put foundations under them--Thoreau."

Mrs. Caleb Wheeler, the vice-president of our society, has presented the original painting of Hubbard Bridge by the late N.C. Wyeth to the Concord Library. This was one of a series used as illustrations in Thoreau's *MEN OF CONCORD*, edited by Francis H. Allen about ten years ago. The painting was given in memory of Mrs. Wheeler's son who was killed in World War II. We understand that the library hopes eventually to own many more of the paintings in this series.

THE ANNUAL MEETING

The 1947 annual meeting of the Thoreau Society was held, as usual, in Concord, Mass., on Saturday, July 12th, the one hundred and thirtieth anniversary of Thoreau's birth. The meeting was called to order by the president, Raymond Adams, at 10:20 a.m. in the First Parish Church vestry. The address of the morning was delivered by Herbert Faulkner West, Professor of Comparative Literature at Dartmouth College.

At 11:15 a.m., the business meeting was opened with the reading of the minutes of the 1946 meeting by the secretary. This and the treasurer's report were accepted as read.

The president presented a brief report of the activities of the committee appointed in 1946 to prepare a marker for the site of Thoreau's cabin at Walden Pond. The marker was announced in readiness to be dedicated at the afternoon meeting.

The president announced the resignation of Leonard Kleinfeld as chairman of the Memorial Fund trustees. It was voted to postpone acceptance of his resignation in the hope that he might be persuaded to continue with his work.

Upon a unanimous vote, the society rose and stood for a moment in silence in tribute to the late Allen French, who was so long one of the leaders of our society.

It was voted that the society reprint for distribution the "Thoreau Annex" of the CONCORD FREEMAN as its reprint for 1947. This was a special issue devoted to Thoreau of a late nineteenth century newspaper. It will be distributed to the members as soon as possible, probably with the October bulletin.

G. Winthrop Lee, chairman of the nominating committee, offered that body's recommendation that the executive committee be enlarged and strengthened. This motion was rejected.

The nominating committee then recommended that last year's slate of officers be continued in office. This group was unanimously reelected. However, Mr. Lee resigned as a member of the executive committee and Miss Ritchell was elected to take his place. Thus the officers for the coming year are:

President: Raymond Adams, Chapel Hill, N.C.

Vice-president: Mrs. Caleb Wheeler, Concord, Mass.

Secretary-treasurer: Walter Harding, 76 Murray Place, Princeton, N.J.

Executive committee:

The above, ex-officio.

W.B. Conant, Concord, Mass.

H.W.L. Dana, Cambridge, Mass.

Clayton Hoagland, Rutherford, N.J.

Rella Ritchell, Brooklyn, N.Y.

It was voted that the office of regional correspondent be dropped.

The business meeting was adjourned at 12:20.

A few minutes later, the group again assembled at the old Concord Fair Grounds, just to the rear of Thoreau's ruined Texas House, off Belnap Street. Here a picnic lunch was enjoyed and Raymond Adams, as master of ceremonies, called upon the various members for brief words of greeting. At times the picnic took on the appearance of a reincarnation of the Concord of Thoreau's time for among those introduced were descendants or relatives of Emerson, Hawthorne, Longfellow, Theo Brown, Thoreau himself, and such good old Concord families as the Wheelers and the Hosmers.

Again, promptly at five o'clock, the society met at the cairn at Walden Pond. Mrs. Caleb Wheeler had charge of the exercises dedicating the society's stone marking the hearth-site of Thoreau's house. As a preliminary, Raymond Adams read an unpublished poem by the late Dean Addison Hibbard of Northwestern University. This poem was entitled "The Last Night at Walden" and expressed in Thoreau's words what might have been his thoughts as he left the pond. Roland Robbins then reviewed briefly his finding of the exact site and thanked the county commissioners, of whom Chairman Melvin G. Rogers and Commissioner Edwin O. Childs were present, for their aid in carrying through the marking. Mrs. Wheeler mentioned the keen interest of Mr. Allen French in the marking project and asked Mr. Adams to present the stone in the name of the society to the county board. Mr. Adams

remarked that houses leave their own monuments in their chimneys and hearthstones, that the hearth is also the heart of the house, and that the society had asked to mark the hearth of Thoreau's house with a stone placed like a hearth. He commented on the line carved into the stone, "Go thou my incense upward from this hearth," by saying that Thoreau had written one book, A WEEK, and planned another, WALDEN, at this very hearth and that these books had been an incense or influence around the world. Chairman Rogers, in receiving the marker, commented on the high idealism and good sense of Thoreau and punctuated his remarks with quotations from Thoreau which proved his own wide reading and genuine understanding of the Concord author. Thus the marker was delivered. Mrs. Wheeler then adjourned the meeting.

This was the last formal meeting and the rest of the week-end, as usual, was devoted to walks about the town, canoe trips on the rivers, and quiet conversations on the front porches and around the dining tables of the townsfolk.

The marker dedicated at the cabin site is a piece of granite fieldstone from Thoreau's birthplace on Virginia Road, set flush with the ground at the site of his cabin hearth, and inscribed with the line from his poem "Smoke."

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NOTICE: A small paper-covered notebook was left near the cairn the afternoon of July 12. It has no name in it, but the owner can recover it by dropping a postcard to Raymond Adams, Chapel Hill, N.C. Most of the notes are theological and Episcopalian. It is not, therefore, anything that Thoreau left at Walden.

THOREAU ON THE AIR

Your secretary was en route home from the annual meeting on Sunday morning, July 13th, so he missed the nation-wide broadcast of the Invitation to Learning program when T.V. Smith, professor of philosophy at the University of Chicago; Lynn A. Williams, Jr., president of the Great Books Foundation; and Frederic Babcock, book editor of the CHICAGO TRIBUNE, discussed Thoreau's WALDEN. But with announcement of it in the April bulletin and at the annual meeting, it is to be hoped that most of you were able to hear it. Unfortunately copies of the script are not available so we cannot give you a digest of the discussion here.

THOREAU'S PLAN OF A FARM

We are privileged to include in this issue of our bulletin a hitherto unpublished survey done by Thoreau on March 23, 1850. The plan was discovered by Fred T. Boyd, Concord realtor, and turned over to Wallace B. Conant. It is proposed to deposit this souvenir of Thoreau in the Concord Free Public Library along with other mementoes owned by the society. And it is hoped that the library will eventually set aside a room in its north wing as a special depository of books, documents and other materials pertaining to the great Concord Transcendentalists. This room is almost on the site of the old Parkman House where Thoreau himself once lived.

The plan of the farm then known as the Charles Gordon farm was drawn by Thoreau and shows the bounds of the property located on Old Bedford Road, Concord, the west end of the farm being near the point whence Thoreau surveyed and laid out the cut-off to Concord direct, this new road being known as the Bedford Road, or closer to town as Bedford Street. Just to the east of the farm shown here is the farm of Mrs. Caleb Wheeler, vice-president of our society. Her farm is the site of the birthplace of Thoreau and is now known as Thoreau Farm. Oddly, the Gordon farm later became in part the site of a house built in the '80's in which Mr. and Mrs. Conant lived for thirty years. The larger part of this plot of land is now known as the Henry Mahan farm.

Interestingly enough, the original survey was done on cloth to last better and it has proved its worth, for it is in perfect condition today.

Walter Gierasch of Phillips Academy writes us of some interesting echoes of Thoreau in the writings of the late Willa Cather:

In the opening chapter of *THE PROFESSOR'S HOUSE* Cather describes Godfrey St. Peter's study and speaks of his having got along with an old-model stove, never having looked for a newer one. In the course of the description appear the following two sentences: "But he had been able to get on only by neglecting negative comforts" and "By doing without many so-called necessities he had managed to have his luxuries." (New York: Knopf, 1925, pp. 26-7)

In chapter 6 of Book Nine of *DEATH COMES FOR THE ARCHBISHOP* Bishop Latour and the Navajo Eusabio are remarking on the changes the land has seen since the Bishop's first arrival in New Mexico, particularly about the coming of the railroad. Eusabio says, "Men travel faster now, but I do not know if they go to better things." (New York: Modern Library, n.d., p. 294).

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The *NEW YORKER* recently pointed out a "funny coincidence" between certain lines in Thoreau's *CAFE COD* and "The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket" by this year's Pulitzer prize-winner for poetry, Robert Lowell.

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Poor Henry Thoreau may revolve in his grave if he, a determined bachelor, learns that the bulletin is to be used for a wedding announcement. But, nonetheless, the secretary takes great pleasure in announcing the wedding of Marjorie Brook of Princeton, N.J. to Walter Harding on June 7, 1947. The bride has been properly inducted into the society and her handiwork may be found in the map gracing the first page of this bulletin and in the compilation of the directory which accompanies the bulletin.

ADDITIONS TO THE THOREAU BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adams, J. Donald. "Speaking of Books." *NEW YORK TIMES*. June 6, 1947. On H.M. Tomlinson's literary debt to Thoreau.
- Ballou, Adin. "'When the dark trumpet sounds' (After reading Thoreau)." *NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE*. April (?), 1947. A sonnet.
- BOSTON GLOBE. "Thoreau Tablet is Dedicated at Walden Pond." July 13, 1947. A news account.
- BOSTON POST. "Boston's Literary 'Golden Age' As Seen a Century Later: No. 12--Henry David Thoreau." March 29, 1947. A brief essay.
- Canby, Henry Seidel. *THOREAU*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Poseidon. A Spanish translation of the 1939 biography.
- Chamberlain, Allen. "Thoreau on Monadnock." *CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR*. April 24, 1947. An excerpt from the book *THE ANNALS OF THE GRAND MONADNOCK*.
- CONCORD ENTERPRISE. "Would Have School Named for Thoreau." July 24, 1947. Rella Ritchell presents her plan for a Thoreau memorial.
- Dabbs, James McBride. "Thoreau--The Adventurer as Economist." *YALE REVIEW*. Summer, 1947. Pp. 667-672. An essay.
- Frost, Ruth H. "Thoreau's Worcester Friends: III. Thomas Wentworth Higginson: His Worcester Years." *NATURE OUTLOOK*, V (May, 1947), 4-7, 33. Another essay in this excellent series.
- Halle, Louis J., Jr. *SPRING IN WASHINGTON*. New York: William Sloane, 1947. 227pp. \$3.75.

Every year brings forth a flood of nature books which are almost invariably compared with the work of Thoreau--and most suffer in the comparison. Mr. Halle however has presented a report of the arrival of spring in our nation's capital that, while retaining its own individuality, has much of the philosophical depth of Thoreau. He opens his book with the statement that he sights the world along Thoreau's extended arm and nearly every page shows the influence of the Concordian. Whether or not you live in Washington,

if you are a nature lover, you will enjoy this report on the universe. Excellent illustrations by Francis L. Jacques add much to the beauty of the book. While it doesn't mention Thoreau directly, Leonard Dubkin's *ENCHANTED STREETS* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1947. 210pp.) does much the same in reporting nature walks around Chicago.

Lee, Harry. "Wartime Economies." *LIBERTY MAGAZINE*. March 26, 1943. A poem.

NEW YORK SUN. "Thoreau on the Price of a House." May 12, 1947. An editorial on the *TOMORROW'S TOWN* article listed below.

NEW YORK TIMES. "Thoreau's Home Marked." July 13, 1947. An account of the Concord meeting.

Robbins, Roland Wells. *DISCOVERY AT WALDEN*. Reviews: *BOSTON GLOBE*, March 26, 1947; *NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE*, March 16, 1947; Scudder, Townsend *NEW ENGLAND QUARTERLY*, Summer, 1947 ("Robbins, who calls himself a 'Thoreau Yankee,' tells his story with shrewd, homespun, naively humorous quaintness.")

Scudder, Townsend. *CONCORD: AMERICAN TOWN*. Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1947. 421pp. \$5.00

Mr. Scudder has attempted "a more human approach to America's story" by telling the nation's history as reflected in the life of one small town rather than of the country as a whole. So this is no ordinary history of Concord, but rather a history of the United States as seen on the Milldam. It will be of particular interest to the Thoreau student for in one handy volume it gives both the national and local background of Thoreau's time. Unfortunately it devotes much space to military history at the expense of cultural history. But, nevertheless, one does get a better picture of Thoreau's hometown background than in any other book I've seen. It is of course inevitable that errors should creep into any book as detailed as this. Yet the only errors that your reviewer detected were minor factual ones that can easily be corrected in a later edition. For the sake of the record, we'll point out two: Thoreau's house-raising was not on July 4, 1845, but several months earlier, and the name on Page 393 should be Mrs. Fannie H. Eckstrom. I can promise any friend of either Thoreau or Concord interesting reading in this book.

Smith, May Riley. "The Scarecrow." in *POEMS*. New York: Poet's Guild, 1929. A poem.

Thoreau, Henry David. *WALDEN*. Edited by Edwin Way Teale. Review: *CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR*. March 29, 1947.

_____. *THE WORKS OF THOREAU*. Edited by Henry Seidel Canby. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1947. A reissue, minus the photographic plates, of Dr. Canby's excellent volume of selections in a less expensive edition (now \$3.00) in the new Cambridge Series of prose writers.

TOMORROW'S TOWN. "Thoreau on Housing." April, 1947. An excerpt from Thoreau in the publication of the National Committee on Housing, Inc.

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THE THOREAU SOCIETY BULLETIN is a publication of the Thoreau Society issued quarterly to all members. Membership in the society is open to all who are interested in the life and writings of Henry David Thoreau. Dues are one dollar a year, payable to the secretary-treasurer.

Officers of the society are Raymond Adams, Chapel Hill, N.C., president; Mrs. Caleb Wheeler, Concord, Mass., vice-president; and Walter Harding, 76 Murray Place, Princeton, N.J., secretary-treasurer.

All material in the bulletin, unless otherwise signed, is by the secretary. All communications concerning the society or the bulletin should be addressed to the secretary. As seems to be his habit, the secretary is footloose once again. Until September 1, 1947, he should be addressed at Camp Cherokee, Beech Lake, Pa. After that date, his address will be

Walter Harding
76 Murray Place
Princeton, N.J.